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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000598

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN MALIAN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES MEET IN AGOUNI,  
AUG 1-2

REF: A. BAMAKO 538

[1](#)B. BAMAKO 163

Classified By: PolCouns Peter Newman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On August 1-2, the Berabiche Arab community of Timbuktu organized and hosted a rare meeting of representatives of all Northern Malian ethnic communities, (the first such meeting in 10 years), to discuss the threat posed by Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Government representation was limited to Minister of Culture Mohamed el Moctar and Minister of Agriculture Aghatam ag Alhassane. Arab, Tuareg, and GOM officials all conveyed to POLCOUNS that the meeting was largely a Berabiche overture to the other ethnic communities of Northern Mali. Some were pleased with the show of unity, in spite of some lingering skepticism. Kidal Tuaregs and the Berabiche have tentatively proposed a follow-on meeting in early-October 2009. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On Aug 1-2, the Berabiche Arab community organized and hosted a meeting in the town of Agouni, approximately 30 km north of Timbuktu. The meeting gathered members of most of the major ethnic groups in Northern Mali including Berabiche Arab, Tuareg and Songhai. Minister of Culture Mohamed el Moctar, who also served as a Telemsi Arab representative, and Minister of Agriculture Aghatam ag Alhassane, who also served as the representative of the Gao Tuareg community, also attended.

[1](#)3. (C) Kidal Iforas Tuaregs were initially skeptical of the Berabiche's motivations, but two National Assembly Deputies from Kidal Province told POLCOUNS they were pleased with the show of unity. Both commented that the Berabiche were worried about keeping the peace in Northern Mali, and construed the meeting as outreach to the broader Northern Mali population. They said the participants agreed to a short consensus statement expressing the view that AQIM is a problem and that all northern communities should work with the Malian Armed Forces against AQIM.

[1](#)4. (C) One of the Deputies said he did not believe any new cooperation would come of the Agouni meeting, while yet another National Assembly Deputy later informed POLCOUNS that a follow-up meeting, jointly organized by the Iforas and the Berabiche, was tentatively being planned for early-October 2009. The plan is to invite almost all groups invited to the Agouni meeting plus regional political leaders, including governors and prefects. Conspicuously missing from the list are the Telemsi Arabs and the Imghad Tuaregs of Gao province. The Kidal Tuaregs believe these groups are trying

to  
sow discord among the northern communities (See septel).

¶5. (C) Regarding Kidal Tuareg cooperation with the Malian Armed Forces, one Deputy expressed pessimism about any renewed willingness to create mixed units of Iforas Tuareg and Southern Malians, as had been agreed in the 2006 Algiers Accords. Conversely, another did mention that the Malian Armed Forces are already working with Taghat Malet Tuaregs from Kidal (a tribe traditionally lower in the Tuareg hierarchy than the Iforas), stemming from cooperation during the campaign to defeat Ibrahim ag Bahanga in January-February 2009 and later political machinations.

¶6. (C) Although he did not attend the conference, Presidential Advisor on Security Affairs Kader Bah told POLCOUNS separately that the participants reached no hard commitments on improving security in the north. When asked about the prospects of expanding mixed units beyond the limited engagement provided by the Echelons Tactiques Inter-Armes (ETIAS - see Reftel A), Bah demurred except regarding the inclusion of Kidal Tuaregs, with whom he said cooperation would be unlikely. He said others in the GOM consider them to be guns for hire that have no loyalty to the Malian state and are unwilling to fight outside of Kidal.

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¶7. (C) Comment: Post views the Aug 1-2 Agouni meeting as a small but positive step toward political reconciliation among northern communities. After the killing of Briton Edwin Dyer and the assassination of Colonel Lamana ould Bou (himself an ethnic Berabiche), the Berabiche leaders have perhaps begun to recognize the danger that AQIM poses to stability in Northern Mali. That they were able to convoke representatives of most of the northern ethnic communities shows the increased interest many Northern Malians have in resolving the AQIM problem, even while they remain suspicious of one another. The possibility of a follow-on meeting in October, though far from assured, is promising. End comment.

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